



# Smallpox Brief: July 21, 2003

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

Topic: **CALIFORNIA ALLOWS LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS  
TO VACCINATE EMERGENCY RESPONDERS**

SACRAMENTO – Local health departments have been given approval to increase their existing smallpox response teams by vaccinating police, firefighters and emergency medical services personnel if they choose to do so, State Health Director Diana M. Bontá, R.N., Dr.P.H., announced today. Previously, California's smallpox vaccination program has focused on vaccinating public health care and hospital workers in state and local health departments.

"Local health departments are in the best position to decide whether to add police, firefighters, and other first responders to their smallpox response teams," Bontá said. "We are encouraging each local health department to assess its state of preparedness and proceed as it determines is most appropriate."

In announcing California's decision, Bontá emphasized that the program remains completely voluntary. She said local health departments had indicated their interest in possibly adding a small number of first responders to their vaccination teams. Some departments, she added, may choose not to add additional personnel based on their assessment of local need.

"Smallpox vaccination is just one aspect of emergency preparedness," Bontá said. "Some local health departments may prefer to focus their current efforts on education, communication, surveillance or training."

To ensure awareness and coordination of state and local efforts, CDHS contacted state representatives of police, fire and emergency medical services' organizations. Local health departments will determine which agencies and personnel are appropriate for their smallpox response teams and how to schedule vaccinations within available resources.

Since the resumption of smallpox vaccinations in California in March, 1,847 individuals have been vaccinated. Working with local health departments, CDHS has provided information and training to public health and health care workers who have volunteered to be vaccinated.

For more information about smallpox in English and Spanish, please visit <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/smallpox> or call the Governor's Office of Emergency Services Safety Information and Referral Line at (800) 550-5234, or TDD for the hearing impaired at (800) 550-5281.

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